



# Psychedelic-assisted Coaching, Part IV

Hypnosis shares the psychedelic space.

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“The problem is not to find the answer, it’s to face the answer.”

— **Terence Mckenna**

In parts I and II of this series, I distinguished therapy from coaching. In part III I reviewed dangers and opportunities. I expected to conclude here, in part IV, but I have not.

# Following the Money

In coaching school we're taught to look to the future and to avoid what counselors do, which is to look into the past. This distinction is a bit cheap but it's the defining juncture that separates the two professions. This is the legacy that pulls these professions apart.

Coaching and counseling are different because of the different mindsets of their customers: the struggling patient and the budding entrepreneur. Two counseling professions have been created to satisfy two different markets.

People have many similarities but their expectations amplify their differences. These two groups perceive themselves as heading in opposite directions: one is dealing with their past while the other is focused on their future.

Beneath these intentions is the reality that the past is a memory, the future is a fantasy, and both illusions define us in the present. You can no more exist without a past than you can exist without a future. Not only are both necessary, but they are distorted reflections of each other. It's the sloppy marketing jingle that counseling engages the past while coaching engages the future that cheapens the two fields to an embarrassing level.

What counseling client could expect to resolve their past issues without considering how those issues effect their future? What entrepreneurially minded person could expect to better navigate the future if they are not going to start by considering who they've grown to be?

The real reason for the past versus future distinction is the difference in consumer demand, the shortage of providers, the time it takes to train for both past and future, and the attraction of money. "Follow the money," we're told in matters of politics and economics. The same goes for counseling and coaching.

As physicists we were not taught about money. Science was all about truth, reality, and knowledge. This is another professional fallacy that links preconceptions taught in the past with limitations imposed on the future. Most of the research done today is funded by industry (Pinto, 2020), and we know what industries follow.

If you want to advance in physics, just as if you want to advance in counseling or coaching, you'd better understand the money, where it comes from, where it's going, and why. The same pretty much applies to whatever profession you're in.

# Taking It for Granted

Most coaches and client-centered counselors will agree that the client sets the agenda. Most coaches and some client-centered counselors agree that the client discovers the solution. The truth of the past contrasted with the opportunity of the future, a difference unwittingly encouraged by these professionals, is ultimately in the client's mind.

Like all good salespeople—and counselors and coaches are salespeople—they aim to provide what their clients want. The past versus future dichotomy hamstrings the process of change, but it reflects common misconceptions. It's what sells these services, so we'd better accept it.

Having trust in who you're speaking with is essential if you're going to take their suggestions seriously. You're not going to trust another if they don't take your intentions seriously. So, if your intention is to look to the future, then a coach had better do the same, or at least be pointed in that direction.

Your past plays an essential role in whatever are the future issues you're working on, but assuming you're more comfortable focusing on the future, we start there. The coaching protocols are future oriented and strictly rational. They look at rational strategies and assumptions. Cognitive Behavior Therapy does this too, and it would be a guarantee of failure if not for the fact that a sincere client will move to recognize their real underlying obstacles regardless of where they start.



## **The Seven Dwarfs**

For two years I offered Past Life Regression at a free monthly walk-in clinic. Thirty clients would huddle around the front door before we opened hoping to get an early booking with the practitioner of their choice. There were fifteen of us and most of us were doing body work.

There was one counselor and I offered a combination of neurofeedback and hypnosis. Few of those who came had any idea what to expect and no previous experience with my modalities. On one

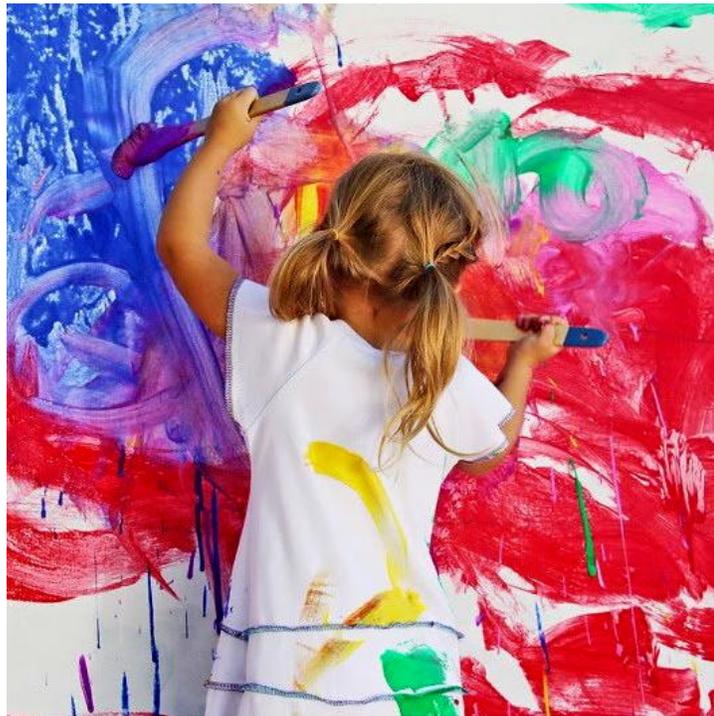
occasion a fellow arrived with a dismissive attitude. I couldn't get a bead on why he was there, but when I described Past Life Regression he scoffed, so we began.

When doing trance work you get people who fall on the spectrum between the easily hypnotizable and the analytic resisters. You don't usually get people who are hostile and indifferent, but that describes who I was working with on that day. He was going to show me how silly the idea of Past Life Regression was by imagining the story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

I led him through a routine of progressive muscle relaxation. I talked him into a relaxed state with guided visualization. We went to a hillside in the evening, walked through the woods, and then came to a little cabin. We went inside and sat down by the fire.

He was pretty spaced out at this point but he retained enough of his previous intentions to assemble The Seven Dwarfs. Then I asked him to listen to what they had to say and, at that point, he had nothing prepared.

After a silent period during which his characters spoke no lines, one of the dwarfs broke character and began describing life as it was. I recall that an animal appeared and started wrecking havoc. My client was getting upset because these characters had something to say that he wasn't putting into them. They had gotten away from him. That's what Past Life Regression is all about.



# Doing What's Appropriate

The psychedelic experience is a paradigm for letting things get away from you. There is a presumption in psychedelic-assisted therapy that the situation can be contained by starting with the right intentions and providing a supportive environment. It doesn't work like that.

Opening the closet of one's dreams in a haunted environment is probably going to amplify a negative state of mind, but that is only the first step. If a person is feeling truly unsafe, then that will be a pothole, but regardless of potholes you are on the road of your true intentions.

Set and setting refer to your mindset and environment. The presumption is that you need to feel safe and comfortable if you want to evolve a comfortable experience. Don't tell this to Japanese Zen meditators who sit uncomfortably for hours and whose senior monk carries the Soto kyosaku, a sixteen inch hardwood batten referred to as "the encouragement stick".

*"If a learned teacher is present, he will immediately see clearly that the student is in such a state [of dullness] and will strike the meditator with the flat stick, thus clearing away the confusing dullness; a great many are thereby awakened to the truth."* — **Master Hsu Yun** (The Editors, 1998)

The difference between Zen and psychedelics is that in Zen you can return to a reality of your intentions whereas in a psychedelic experience this usually isn't the case. Discomfort can cross the dissociative barrier but not without distortion.

## The Three Realities

We need to recognize that because psychedelics lead to psychic dissociation there will always be at least two recognizably separate realities: the physical and the mental. It's clear that the physical reality must be supportive because, when dissociated into one's mental reality and away from the physical, adjusting one probably won't improve the other.

Dissociation doesn't mean that these two worlds are separate and independent, it means that they cannot understand and may not affect each other. It's all too often true that what feels good in one reality may not feel good in the other.

The recent revelation of Dryer and Yensen's disastrous attempt in a psychedelic-assisted therapy context to calm a PTSD-afflicted client with physical cuddling which the client perceived as an assault (Lindsay, 2022) reminds us that good intentions can fail dramatically.

Mental reality consists of layers. Consciousness is the top layer and this is the layer of intention and perception. Below that, the subconscious is not neatly arranged in layers, it is a collage. The subconscious is not linear, rational, or sequential. Because of this, one's conscious intention has limited, directive effects.

When psychologists begin to understand the general structure of the subconscious we'll start to create an effective roadmap for psychedelic-assisted therapy. I have not yet met any who do, but I know some people who understand the subconscious more or less.

The shamans know from personal experience as did some highly intuitive therapists like Carl Jung and Virginia Satir. Hypnotherapists can be familiar but not everyone goes that deeply. Some famous ones have and have written about it, people like Ernest Rossi, Milton Erickson, Charles Tebbetts, and Dabney Ewing.

We have three realities: the physical responds to the setting, the conscious that holds one's mind-set, and the subconscious that will go wherever it wants when and if it has the authority to do so. In all therapies, except psychedelic-assisted therapy, the subconscious is caged. Depending on the psychedelic that's used and the skill of the person experiencing it, that cage can be opened.



## **The Sitter**

The Multi-disciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies has guidelines for psychedelic-assisted therapy (MAPS, 2022) and they are most conservative. This is appropriate for a field that is still coming out of the shadows of legal opprobrium, but it's not the direction most effective for the client. It's aimed at what's most effective for the progress in the field. The therapist is a sitter according to MAPS protocols.

Sitters neither participate or engage, they establish a positive mind-set and maintain a safe and supportive setting. This is made clear through the various programs for training therapists in which experience with psychedelics is not required, endorsed, encouraged, explored, or explained. Sitters don't understand the psychedelic experience or the subconscious. They sell the product but they have not read the manual.

# The Barker

A barker is a person who stands in front of a theater, sideshow, or concession and calls out to passersby to attract customers. A shaman is a barker. The sideshow is your mind, and the customers are angels. For the most part the angels are not interested. They are concerned with the serious work of the dysfunctions of humanity. The shaman exhorts them to pay you some attention and, if they do, it's the angels that will affect you.

This is not a description that all shaman's will accept. I don't know as I have not polled them all, but it's the best description I've been given. It fits the behavior of all the shamans I've known, whether it matches their description of themselves or not.

Another way to say the same thing is that the shaman sees and shapes the energy in the environment and in the person. In some cases the shaman attempts to inject or extract energy through the use of sound, smoke, touch, and energetic influence.

This is not a recognition of the subconscious as I know it, but it's fair to say that it's the container of it. You'll find consonant descriptions of energy and consciousness used by practitioners of Reiki (Miles, 2008), Energy Healing (Eden, 2008), and Matrix Energetics (Bartlett, 2009).

Barkers sell and use the product. They help you acquire the tools and work in your best interests, but they don't help you build it. You have to assemble the finished product yourself.

# The Guide

The only people I know who are guides of the subconscious are hypnotists. But then, everyone is a hypnotist, it's just that most deny it. The only trustworthy ones are hypnotherapists as they're committed to playing a role that's in your best interest.

Hypnotherapists don't know what you're doing because, in the realm of the subconscious, only you can know. I find it refreshingly honest when people admit they don't know all that's going on. Across the board, that has been a character trait of the people I respect the most.

It reminds me of the great physicists who would candidly admit they don't know how things work at a fundamental level. It's an attitude of the one prophet I knew who could stop all inquiries into the source of his power by saying at the start, "I don't do anything and I have no idea!" You'd think that every scientist would admit their fundamental ignorance, but most are attached to a false image of sagacity.

I have to clarify. Just because hypnotherapists don't know what you're doing doesn't mean they can't guide you. What they do is a combination of guiding and leading. You have the sight and you have the motive force, but they can help provide illumination, encouragement, support, and protection.

This is certainly not something that all hypnotherapists do or are trained to do, but it is within the purview of those trained in Past Life Regression. I find it most ironic that in this potentially complex

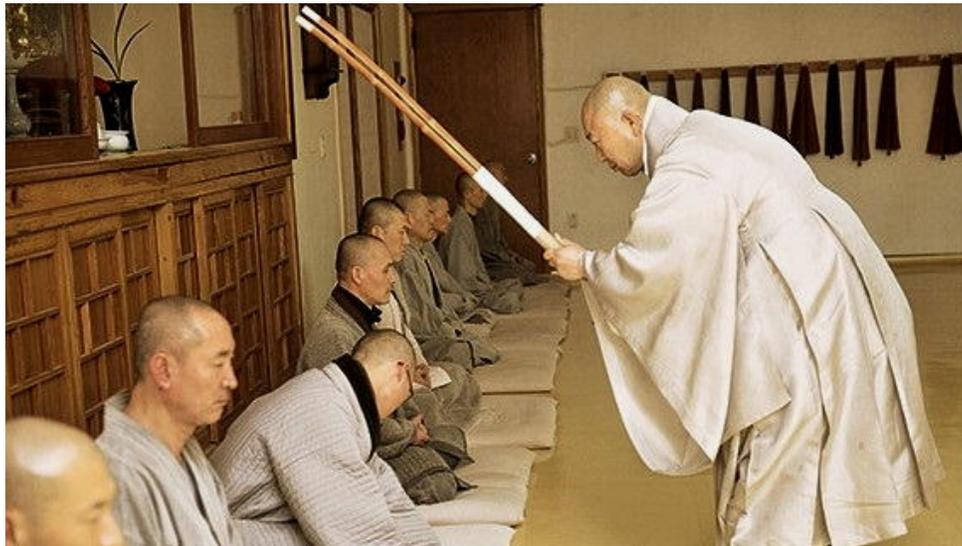
and sensitive area relatively little training is required. You don't need any theory and you don't need any methods or formulas; all you need is sensitivity and experience.

There is one essential reason for this, and the reason is that you, the client, is the source of the wisdom. The client is the prophet, explorer, and scientist, while the guide is just working the tools. They have a compass that keeps you moving in a safe direction, they keep to the path on the map that you are revealing, and they remember the way back to safety so that you can devote all of your attention to looking forward.

## Psychedelic-assisted Coaching is...

I've run out of space.

I really intended to get to it in this installment, and I sketched out all I wanted to say, but I have run out of time. In the next installment I will describe how a hypnotic alliance can be the foundation for psychedelic-assisted coaching.



*“According to an unspoken etiquette, monks who were sitting earnestly and well were shown respect by being hit vigorously and often; those known as laggards were ignored by the hall monitor or given little taps if they requested to be hit. Nobody asked about the ‘meaning’ of the stick, nobody explained, and nobody ever complained about its use.” — T. Griffith Foulk from *The encouragement stick* (The Editors, 1998)*

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